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ABSTRACT

This book presents the memories of a group of old people about life in Hackney, England, from the beginning of this century up until today. A particular emphasis is placed on what good and bad health has meant to people over the years and the sort of people and institutions they have turned to when ill health has struck. The contributors are from the Kingshold Day Care Centre in South Hackney. Their stories are not objective, but are colored by the way the story tellers experience the present. In that sense they tell a lot about people's present lives as well as their past. It covers the contributors' childhood and adjustment to the different world of today. The booklet ends with a brief look at being old in the 1980s. (YLB)

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"HOW WE SURVIVED THE GOOD OLD DAYS"

MEMORIES OF HACKNEY BEFORE AND AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

BY

THE KINGSHOLD ORAL HISTORY GROUP

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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INTRODUCTION - WHY THIS BOOK?

By The Editor

This book presents a group of old people's memories of life in Hackney from the beginning of this century up till today, with a particular emphasis on what good and bad health has meant to people over the years, and the sort or people and institutions they have turned to when ill health has struck. The group drew its members from the **KINGSHOLD DAY CARE CENTRE** in South Hackney.

I took the initiative to start the group in the summer of 1986, when I began making weekly visits to the Kingshold Centre. My interest in stories about old time Hackney has many sources. First of all, I am working on a project which aims in several ways to promote and explore the links between Hackney primary care services and the community in which they are located. The project, **COMMUNITY ROOTS PROJECT**, is sponsored jointly by the **ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL PRACTICE AND PRIMARY CARE** at St. Bartholomew's Hospital's Medical College, and **COMMUNITY ROOTS TRUST**, an organisation representing and promoting black and Afro-Caribbean interests, with a strong base in Hackney.
Community Roots Project was set up to see if it is possible to increase and use knowledge about the local area in improving care of patients in primary

care. We have pursued this aim through many kinds of activities: by running patient groups of various kinds: for example groups for mothers - to - be, and unemployed persons, and by running groups and events for professionals. We also collected information about the area, and tried to ask people living there how they meet the challenges life in Hackney presents to them. The information and experience we got from this work is being written up and presented to audiences of professional carers, local, national and international. One of my aims with this particular group was to find out more about the area in which we worked, to gain some understanding of the changing context of primary care in a part of London's East End, and to learn about this through the eyes and experience of some of its older inhabitants.

It is felt by many today that health and illness are more than simply a matter of how the body functions. People's living environment and ways of life: work, home life, family and neighbourhood relationships may influence the sort of illness we get; and definitely how it affects us, how we feel about it, and who is around to lend a hand if we are unwell.

Similarly, health care is more than a matter of medical knowledge. A good family doctor uses knowledge abut his or her patient and their way of life to help and support them. However, the

methods doctors use to collect and apply such information and insights are poorly understood and developed. I therefore wanted to try and see 1) if the old people's stories could tell us something about life in Hackney over the years, and what it is like to be old in Hackney today, and 2) if this kind of information can be of use both to people living in Hackney, and to members of the caring professions serving Hackney citizens.

ORAL HISTORY AS A METHOD - OLD PEOPLE'S EXPERTISE.

There are many ways of collecting information about an area. There are sources of official statistics, historical records, formal surveys of various kinds. These provide us with an overview and what seem to be hard, tangible facts. People's stories about their lives give us something different. They are not "objective"; memories are not accurate accounts of what happened 50 - 60 years ago. They are coloured by the way the story tellers experience the present. In that sense they tell us a lot about their present life, as well as their past. The group of people asked to contribute to this book are not representative of all old people in Hackney, either statistically or demographically. They represent themselves, with the complexity and richness only individual lives can portray.
Perhaps because it is personal and subjective, oral history - good oral history - involves the listener

and the reader personally, on several levels: intellectually, emotionally and existentially. "Doing" oral history means listening, reflecting, giving and receiving on the part of everybody: the storytellers, the writers, and the readers. The stories are "coming out of the heart", and they speak to us in this way. We are given the rare opportunity to share in another person's experience of a world which looks different from the one we are used to. Oral history is more than nostalgia, which leaves the past safely behind. Oral history about an area in which we live or work, and about the kinds of people we meet daily, is about reality, our personal reality: this is a bit of the world we are living in. Listening to people's stories about their lives forces us to reconsider our own practices, ideas, prejudices, whether as a doctor, health visitor, social worker, researcher, neighbour, son or daughter. We can enjoy the nostalgia: "you regret having lost it - the past, so gentle and kind", but there is also something to face and reflect upon in this material, so I ask the reader to listen to the stories.

Oral history is not something for old people only. The method has been used for younger people, unemployed for example. But in my attempts to find out about the area in which I was working, I first sought out old people. They have a wealth of knowledge about their area and its history, and they have experienced changes which have taken place over more than half a century. Who are in a better

position to tell us about these changes and how they relate to the present, than they?

There has been some debate as to the function and value of old people reminiscing about the past. "Living in the past" is often used as a negative description of people who are not willing or able to live in the present. It is now believed, however, that thinking about the past is a very important part of managing our present, both for young and old.

The Kingshold Oral History Group is different from the other groups started by the Project, and perhaps many similar groups, in that it was defined from the outset as a group with a contribution to make. It was not a "problem group". I hope the group members have enjoyed the work and in this way have got something from it, but they have probably given more than they have received. For me, the oral history group was throughout the time I have been working on the project, the most enjoyable work activity I ever undertook. I think perhaps it was because I did not see myself as mainly a provider - of care, of solutions, of information - but as a recipient of good stories, of wisdom, of jokes and of laughter. In that way, our relationship was perhaps a more realistic one than the one sided relationship often portrayed between provider and recipient of care and services.
The material in this book shows that the members of Kingshold Oral History Group are not only able

to recall their past in a very colourful and entertaining way, they are also very capable when it comes to managing their present. This book is evidence of valuable ways in which the users of primary health care services are not only recipients of help, but also contributors to that service. It is by listening to and learning from our patients and clients that carers can learn how to provide a realistic and good service. Providing care, perhaps particularly in deprived areas like the inner city, can be a very demanding and frustrating job. How can one single person hope to combat the forces contributing to a kind of environment which we know is in many ways detrimental to health and welfare? Listening to people's stories can be a way to see our limitations and potential, and thus help us come to terms with a difficult job.

CHILDHOOD.

"WE WORKED HARD, AND WE WERE POOR. BUT EVERYBODY WAS THE SAME, AND WE WERE HAPPY."

Joe's story:

(Joe is in his seventies. He has lived in Hackney all his life. He has been a widower for 9 years, and lives with his son, who works in a local department store. Joe has very poor eyesight, and a bad leg, but he is a source of good humor and jokes. Even his daring jokes somehow never seem in bad taste. He loves acting, a talent which often benefits the Centre at the parties which are organised from time to time. (Kingshold is known for its good parties.) We once discussed whether Joe has any enemies. We could not think of any. He says he carried his childhood with him all through his life. Knowing him, you know what he means.)

"Born in 1910, covers a big span, really. There was mum, dad and three children. I lost my father in the First World War, it was in 1922 that he actually died, from the war effort. He was in France, all over the place, fighting a machine gun.
Mum brought up three children on the widows pension. She was a very good mother to make ends meet. (The widows pension was only ten shillings per week.) She used to go out step cleaning. We

ONE OF THE EARLIEST LONDON BUSES. IT CARRIED WORLD WAR 1 SOLDIERS ALL THE WAY TO FRANCE AND WAS AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN AS "OLD BILL"

used to come with her and we played while she worked, my younger sister and I. My elder brother, he was a loner, he wanted to be on his own, but I was always playing with my younger sister - we really got on well.

On Saturday nights, when she had finished, mum would say "You have been good kiddies. Come on." And she would take us down to the corner shop and buy us jam rolls. That tasted good, that did! She was a good parent, well, they were both good parents, and she raised us well. She was very strict, and she did not let us get away with things. But she brought us up properly, and I think my childhood lasted me through my life; that's terribly important, that sort of thing. I built up on that, really.

My father was a porter, like, in a restaurant: the famous Joe Lyons tea and corner shops, and they had the girls in there - they used to call them "nippies", another name for waitresses, you know. "Don't be nippy, come in and have a cup of tea," was the slogan.

We used to have to go down to the pub to get our dad a jug of beer in the evening. This was mainly a job for the boys. We did not buy beer in pints, but in jugs.

When he got the beer, dad would stick the fire poker in it. I still remember the hissing sould it made, and I remember the smell. I don't know why he did it, it must have tasted better hot.
One Sunday, when we should have been in Sunday School, my dad saw a neighbour's boy and I playing in the park. We told our parents we had been to Sunday School. He boxed my ears - I can feel it

JOE LYONS TEA SHOPS WERE VERY POPULAR

now! Mondays a film was on at the cinema. The next day he saw my brother and I standing by the door. "What are you doing shuffling by the door?" he said. "All right, then come with me!" And he took us to the cinema with him. So for us, it was Sunday School on Sunday, and the cinema on Monday, and the two were right next door to each other.

My mother didn't have any help, no relations came, she was really alone. There was Uncle Jack, but he didn't come much. We were really a one unit family. The place I was born in, a house in Grove Road, I lived there till I joined up. There was another family upstairs, and another 2 people at the top; we were friends with them, like.

We all went to Sunday School, that was the place deadly opposite. Mum used to go (to church) herself. She always insisted we go to church; once in the morning, then later on for the service, and then Sunday School in the afternoon. I really liked that (Sunday School) and carried on going. I became the registrar for the children. I liked children especially: these children used to come in, bring me sweets, and say: "Johnny could not come, 'cause he had no shoes". I mean, it was a poor area. I carried on till I was 25, because I carried on with the marking of attendance cards.

The only reason I stopped was because I was told I was marking children in who weren't there, giving too many prizes, so with that I said: "Thank you very much", and I never went any more. But I loved it; working with children, that's part of my life. It influenced the way I am now, you know.

I had fits when I was a baby, and I was often ill as a child. I went to hospital more than other children; in fact I was hardly ever in school, so much so that my mother asked one of the teachers if my being away from school so much affected my learning in any way. She answered "The funny thing is, he picks up quick while he is here."
The Hackney Hospital had a bad name, we called it "the Butcher"s shop". I had big boils around my face, and I went there to have them lanced. They did not keep you there, did not even wait for the

anaesthetic to go off. They sent you out straight away. This is one of the things I remember from my childhood: my brother, I had a good brother, we came out from the hospital, (this is terrible, this is,) we got the tram down to the corner, then he used to walk right home through the park and give me a piggy back to the gasworks. Then he went off. I was all right, then. My mother once said to the doctors: "When other men are fighting the war, you pick holes in the children!" The doctor asked her if she was a patient, or a suffragette. I did not know what a suffragette was, and I was a bit worried. But she told me it was all right.

One of the things they done is, when I had my eye scraped, they asked my mother to go while it was being done. She said: "Oh no, if you do anything to my Joe, I want to see it done, I want to watch." And she'd stay there all the time. What they did, they took the eye onto your cheek, like, and then clean the inside of your eye and put it back. I felt that. My mother, well for me, she was the best woman in the world. She was strict, she was a remarkable woman, just an ordinary working woman.

She done well, looked after us marvellously, you know, and we all had handicaps: mine the worst of the lot, more consistent than the others'.

It didn't really affect me that much being ill in my childhood; I was quite contented with it: it's a funny thing to say, I know. I used to go out and play, just the same.

My sister was always saying I was playing in the streets: that's the part I liked about it.

The Whole Group:

"The streets were for us, then. There were no cars, and nobody thought of strangers picking kids up from the street and running away with them. Kids looked after themselves. On Saturdays, big parties of kids would go off to the park. The older children took their younger sisters and brothers and went with their friends, who also had young ones to look after. We took a bottle of water and some breadcrumbs or bread and margarine, and we stayed all day. There was water fountains in the park, too. The park was nice, then. There was a park keeper, who looked after it. There were animals and flower gardens, and in the playground there was a lady who looked after the kids."

"We used to play lots of games: we used to skip, play hopscotch and hoops, whip and tops and marbles. We also played tricks on people, but we were not vandals. We knew where to draw the line. We often played "knock down ginger": knocking on people's doors and running away. We tied a rope between two doors, so that one opened when the other one shut. They kept opening and closing, like a see saw. That was very funny - even the people themselves had to laugh!"

"THE STREETS WERE FOR US ,THEN'.

" There was always lots of children in the streets. You don't see them now. It's too dangerous."

Joe (continues)

"When I started work, (at fifteen) I said to my mum: Look, I want to go to work in the City. And that is what I did. I did it in stages, like. My first job was with a small tailoring firm in Bethnal Green. We used to make stuff for the Hackney Infirmary, which is now Hackney Hospital. Then I went to Shoreditch, and in the end I worked in the City.

When I first started out to work, we started work at 8.30 in the morning, and I probably worked till 11 o'clock at night! I was doing things in the shop during the day, and then they used to send me around with the work they had made, to the shops, so they could get the money for it, you see. And I used to take work out to the outdoor workers. I was fifteen at the time. And if the inspector was going around, the boss would say: "Look, Joe, beat it," he said, and he would send me home. And that was 8 o'clock at night! My mum used to ask me: "Whatever do you do all this time?" But I liked it, because it was an interesting experience. Walking around with the bundle on your shoulder I was often stopped by policemen asking me: "Hey, what have you got there?" But in the end, they would get to know you, and it was all right, you see. Riding on top of the buses. I would get 1 pound a week for that."

It's a thrill when you get your first wage packet. It makes you feel like somebody, grown up. I feel sorry for kids today, having to wait years and years to get a job, and maybe never getting one."
(When Joe was 30 he was called up, but because of bad sight was not sent overseas. He spent the war years stationed in England.)

Florrie's story

(Florrie is also in her seventies. She suffers from diabetes and other complaints, and cannot always make it in to the Centre. You can't tell though. She looks well. Slim, nicely dressed, down to earth. She never complains, always ready for a laugh.)

"There were ten of us: mum, dad, and eight kids. My two elder brothers were much older than us. They were married when I was a girl. I was the eldest of the five ones who were left.

My mum was a midwife. She wasn't certified, no qualifications. She was asked by midwives to help; she probably got a few coppers for it. She'd help with the births and do all the washing and stuff after and help when people were ill. Towards the end she used to do it all herself, she didn't have anybody with her. I reckon she got paid a few shillings. She was doing a good job of work, in them days.

Somebody would knock on our door in the middle of the night and say "You're needed." She'd say "Tell them I won't be a minute! " And she'd leave within five minutes. Never mentioned when she'd be back. She got very efficient at it.

My dad didn't always like it. Once he locked the door in the night so she couldn't get back in. I used to do the cooking and look after the house when she was away, get the kids up, give then a bit of breakfast and get them to school. Once she brought a pile of dirty nappies back and asked me to wash them I refused - they were awful!

She also did washing for people during the week. Even though the men were the main breadwinners, the women worked, too."

Gladys:
(Gladys looked after her mum, and her daughters now return this concern to her. She is still involved with her children and their families).

"My mum was a war widow, and she got ten shillings a week in war pension. It was not much, but she used to say that it was at least a regular income; she knew she could go and collect it every Monday. Lots of families who depended on a man's income were never sure that the money would come in every week. She used to wash people's doorsteps in order to get a bit extra.

Florrie:

"My dad was out of work, and I did not have any shoes. We had to go to a shop down Mare Street called "Chapmans". They gave me a pair of boots with punched holes in them, (so you couldn't take them to the pawn shop). My mum cut them down into shoes, and that's how I went to work. I couldn't afford a new pair".

Whole Group:

"And there was the Parish Relief, the "Bunhouse", although you never got any buns there! At one counter you stopped to get bread, and then you went to another to get potatoes. Men out of work had to queue up for handouts at the "Bunhouse."

Many kids could not go to school because they did not have any boots. The teacher would give them boots from the Relief. They had holes punched in them, so you knew where they came from. Kids from poor families had to go up to the teacher and tell him in front of the class that they went to the relief kitchen for their school dinners, instead of going home. It was a terrible stigma."

Florrie (continues):

"My dad worked on the roads, at St Albans. He had to get up really early, about 5.30, to get the transport that took them to work.

At 9 o'clock at night he would come home, tired out, sit in his favourite chair and go to sleep. We were scared to wake him up; we were really quiet. Maybe we did some knitting or a little bit of reading.

One day, my mum called me into the living room, where my dad was asleep on the settee. She told me to be quiet and to look out. Then she stole my dad's purse out of his pocket and got 1 shilling out. I don't know why I had to be there. I think she expected me to protect her from him if he woke. I was terrified, because he was really big, and I was sure he would hit us both if he woke. I got one penny as the accomplice. He knew one shilling was missing from his purse. He would say to us: "Do you know, there is one shilling missing from my purse." But he never accused any of us.

My dad used to go to the pub on Saturdays. He liked Burton. When he had been drinking, we had to look out. My mum used to say to us: "Be careful, your dad has been drinking Burton." I used to have to take his boots off. When he had been drinking, he used to curl up his toes in the boots so I had to pull very hard to get them off. Then he would suddenly let go, and I would fall over. He though this was very funny, but I could not see the joke.

Friday night, I got pocket money. I was scared to ask so I just stood there. He'd say: "What are you standing there, for?" I'd say: "My penny". He'd say: "What penny - I don't remember." Then I got my weekly penny."

Lily: "You were lucky you got that. I didn't!"

Florrie (continues):
" Fathers got a better fare than the rest of the family. "Fathers got the meat, the kids got the gravy". He would eat when he came home from work. Sometimes we children watched him eat, and he would give us some of his food, depending on the mood he was in. When he came home at night, my dad would hang his coat behind the kitchen door - that was usual, you know, and sometimes when I passed it I felt it and heard paper rustle in one of the pockets. I knew he had a sandwich in the pocket, then. When he had finished eating, he would bring the sandwiches out and ask if anybody wanted any, and shared them out.

Every Monday, the best Sunday clothes went to the pawn broker, together with other things. You could pawn everything - even a canary! At the week end, you would go and get the things out again, if you had the money. One Saturday night, I was going out with my fiancee, and I could not find my best coat. My mum said she had pawned it earlier in the week, and she could not afford to get it out again. Ooh!, was I mad with her! I got my wedding ring from a pawn broker. If you did not get your things out within 3 months, you lost them. The pawnbroker would sell it. You could pick up good things from there.

Whole Group:

"You got ten bob for whatever you pawned, but had to pay one shilling for the ticket. A string to hang it up in and brown paper to wrap it up was 1 penny extra, for those who wanted to be a bit better. Tickets were passed from one person to another. To get the article out again, you had to pay back the 10 bob, plus interest. They made a lot of money, pawnbrokers."

Florrie:

"I finished school when I was fifteen, and went to work. My first job was in a milliner's shop. I got nine shillings and six pence for my first wage packet. My mum let me keep three pence for myself. As I said, there were many of us - mum, dad and six children living at home. We only had two rooms in a house and we were short of space. Then this house opposite became empty and we had enough money to pay "key money" to get in. The family who used to live there were well off, like; there were lorries parked in the street outside and the girls always wore clean pinnies. We were so excited! Two up and two down - we thought it was a palace! We spent hours scrubbing it out before we moved in.
Then when we moved in, the place was alive! None of us could sleep for the bugs; they came out from everywhere. My mum tried to scrub the place and disinfect it, but it did not help. She had the council come round to get rid of the bugs, but they couldn't do anything either."

Whole Group:
"We used to call the bugs "the red brigade". We had white lace on the beds and that showed the bugs up a treat. They said they lived in the plasterwork and the ceilings and that the wallpaper paste they used was good for the bugs. And they never took old wallpaper off before putting the new one on - just glued new paper on top of old, I wonder what

happened to the bugs? They probably got bombed out during the war. Well, that was the good old days - for the bugs, anyway!"

Florrie (continues)

"Holidays were not paid for, and nobody went away for holidays like you do today. We kids went with the Sunday School for a one day outing. We went to Leighton. "Lousy Leighton," we used to call it, I don't know why. And we sometimes went to Southend.

In the summer, some women took the kids off to Kent to go hop picking. The men stayed behind in London during the week, and went out to join their families at week ends. I only went after the war, after I married, because of my mother-in-law. She asked me one year if I wanted to come hopping. I thought,

"Hop picking, I don't know!" It was considered a bit rough, you see. But I went, and it was rough, but I enjoyed it! We slept in little cabins, on straw mattresses, and we cooked outside, on open fires, you could not see one another for the smoke. My boy was only little, then. I had two baskets, he slept in one, and I picked the hop into the other. I got the men to help me move all my stuff up the rows of hops as we kept picking. I did not pick all that much. Then I got what I called " hop gout ". I did not earn any money, then. But I liked it. The Kent air was good for you. They said it built the kids up for the winter.

I married three years before the war. We were just on our feet and then the war came. Before we married, I asked my mum if she could ask my dad if he could get George, my fiancee, a job on the roads. She said she had to wait till he was in the right mood. I kept on asking her: "Mum have you asked dad, yet? And she would say: "I have to get him in the right mood first! " But he did get George a job, in the end."

THE
WAR

AFTERMATH

TODAY: ADJUSTING TO A DIFFERENT WORLD

Whole Group:

"Before, everybody were the same. Things were better for us in some ways, because no one had anything, but it didn't matter. If someone had something that no one else had, they'd offer some, and you'd take it and be grateful, not ashamed. There was a lot of trust. Everyone used to leave the doors open all day. It sounds impossible now. We were more friendly. Today, people have more things, and everybody is afraid of everybody else. People are afraid to let others into their houses to see thing they have, in case they get envious.

In the old days, there were fist fights outside the pub every Saturday night. It used to be the entertainment of the week. There were gangs of fellers fighting each other. And there was violence in the home. Husband against wife. But you knew whom you could trust. There was this man, Joe B. He was always fighting when he was drunk. But he was a good man, and he would never hurt a child. Would never see a child go hungry. Today, all these strangers around; you hear of so many horrible things. Old people mugged and beaten up. You dare not go out."

Helena:

Helena was born in the West Indies, the only black person in the Day Centre. It is not alway easy, but

she has managed to make herself a place there. She is an active member of the church. She also uses other services and goes on trips organised by a voluntary organisation. She helps one of her daughters, who works, look after her children, and sometimes has her six year old grandson staying with her.)

"I came to England from the West Indies in 1952. It was snowing when I came . I was crying to get back. When I came to the house in Holloway, there was this woman in the Prison who had killed her husband. I thought "What place is this?" But I got myself warm, and it got better.

I had two daughters here. One has five children, the other one is expecting her third. I have one son, he is in the West Indies. I don't hear from him, now.

Back home we don't run away from our parents. We want to stay with them. But now they want to live on their own. They get a flat and move out. Maybe it is good. They learn to look after themselves. When they live with you, you worry how they will manage when you not there.

I don't put my trust on them (the children). They look after themselves, I look after myself, with what the Government give me.
My Dennis (her six year old grandson) I love him, but he don't listen to me, and he hurt me. He run away, and I am afraid for him. We learned to listen to our parents, and to open our hearts to the word

of the Lord. Children don't listen no more."

Whole Group:

"Children today are not what they used to be. We were taught respect, for things, for people. Young people today have no respect. They don't know what it is like to be without. We wanted to give our children everything. You don't want them to suffer what you suffered yourself. But maybe this is not always doing the best for them. How can you learn respect when you don't have to work for things? "

Bill:
(Bill comes from a family of dockers. He fought in the Second World War; he was at Dunquerque. He does not want anything like that again. His wife Alice worked on airport bases all over the country during the war.)

"To our parents, children were first priority. When my dad was out of work, and he saw the kids sitting around the table with nothing to eat, he used to say to my mum: "Hang on a minute". And he went up to the Albert Hall and offered himself as a stand in for boxers who had no partner that evening (he was an amateur boxer). He got something like one pound for one evening. He was beaten black and blue, and used to come home in a terrible state. But he was proud to hand the money to my mum and say: "Here, buy the kids something to eat."

Joe:
The wife moved into our house when she was four, so she lived there for sixty four years. After she had gone, (nine years ago) we hadn't been there a year, my boy and I, when we had a break in first time, so that just shows the state of affairs.

The wife, it is nine years ago since she died in Hackney Hospital. Married almost thirty years; all the kindness thrust on me off her, her dad and sisters. I don't think I deserved all I got. If I say I got married on my wage packet, you'd think I was exaggerating, but it's true. When I was young, being on my own, I used to worry about films and never save any money, so much so that I thought I'd never get married. She was one of four sisters and one boy. She stayed on with her dad to look after him after the others married and moved out. Her sister was very keen on her marrying. She hurried the marriage along, like - she couldn't go fast enough. The wife was marvellous. She stopped working in the shop where she had been serving. She was the main part of my life, really, she influenced me. I was close to my father-in-law. I lived in their house - I just moved in. He bought us a bed and two wardrobes. He did us proud. I had no furniture. He was good with the children. He let us go out and baby sat for us.
We had two nice kiddies. A man's first child is his proudest moment, I think.

She had it in the Hackney. I used to walk in the ward, and my little girl, she's a real pretty one, a princess. I used to put the "curtains" up (the mask people had to wear in babys' wards before) and do this with my glasses. The women in the ward all laughing and that, and the wife saying: "Come here Joe, bring her back here!" because I'd look a fool.

As I say, we lost the wife, and we had to live together, my boy and I, and we managed all right. I had my illness, gallstones, and I went to hospital. It was their idea for me to go to a club, because of the food. I was anaemic. He still carries on with his dinners, so we do no cooking for one another. He goes to his job, and I come around here, and that is how we manage, see. We do the house work between us. I do some things when I get home, and he does stuff when he gets in. He does a bit of hoovering, and I can do the floor. We haven't got a home help, but we could if we wanted to.

I'm still close to my daughter, definitely. For Sunday dinner we go to her. They have lovely children, no disturbances. Two boys, one twelve and the other one eight. We have one over for the week end, then the other one said: "I never get to go down to granddads", so we give him a turn and get him down. They're good company - good kids."

Lily: (Lily is small, keeps herself looking attractive, a pleasant women - but sad.)

"Both I and my hubby are from Hackney. We have lived here all our lives. He has been ill for many years, now. He has Parkinson's disease, and he has had several strokes. One year ago, he had a big stroke, and he has been in hospital ever since. I do not think he will get out again - he will not get better. I am not well myself. I have had a stroke, and I have not got over it yet.

I used to live in my old house near Hackney Hospital until two years ago. I liked it there. I knew all my neighbours, and I had people to chat to all day. The house was big, and my family used to come to see me. I used to have the family for Christmas. We had big family Christmases. Then I had a stroke, and my daughter did not want me to live there any more. The house had an outdoor toilet, you see. So she got me this flat in a warden attended block of flats for old people. The flat is nice. It is warm, and it has a bathroom. But I regret it bitterly, coming here. I have nobody to talk to. There is nothing to do except staring at the walls all day. Apart from bingo every Wednesday night, nothing happens here. I am afraid to go out, because if I fall over, I will not be able to get up again. I cannot do much for myself. I was here one and a half years before I started to go to Kingshold. At least it gets you out of the house, and you see some different faces.

I go to see my hubby twice every week. I get a car from Dial-a-ride. It is a terrible strain, seeing him

like this and not being able to do anything for him. But I cannot look after him at home on my own. At least I know he is being well looked after where he is. He is a family man, and we did everything together. We should have been able to enjoy our retired life together, but he has been ill during most of the time.

My daughter is very good. She became a widow when she was 36. Her father used to help her with everything. I used to mind her son when she went to work. She works as a secretary. She comes to see me, and she does things like wash my curtains and my windows, because I cannot climb onto chairs and ladders to do it. I don't like asking her too much, because I know she has enough on her plate. She also goes to see her dad every week, and she helps me when I have him here on a Sunday or for Christmas. My son comes up from where he lives and helps, too.

I have worked all my life. I worked at the Metal Box until I was sixty six. I used to do things for others, but now I am the one who needs help all the time.

Doctors now are not what they used to be. They have no time for you, and they may not know you. You're in and out in five minutes. They do not even look at you - just stare down in their prescription pad. I asked for some pills to help me sleep better

at night. With all the things that are on my mind, I do not sleep well. All she said was: "With your high blood pressure, it is not a good idea for you to take sleeping pills." That is all she said - nothing else. I am going on holidays, to the Social Services guest house in Clacton, in a week. It should do me good, with a break. They arranged that for me, here."

Whole Group:

"They (doctors before) would tell all the family what was going on. They were really the family doctor then. We had the doctors mostly for the children, for measles and things.

They didn't want to worry the doctor unless it was something serious. They (the doctors) had old fashioned ways of doing things. They use different techniques now. I'm talking about fifty years ago. Well, we didn't see him very often, but when we did, it was always the same one, so he knew all the family. But then they divided the borough up and spread the doctors around.

Doctors haven't got the time today to give the personalised service they used to. I don't think the surgeries used to be full up like they are now; maybe two or three people, but not a surgery full. He certainly spent more time with you, didn't hurry you along. Whereas nowdays doctors don't know what kind of person is going to walk in there and cause any kind of trouble - could be drug pushers or anyone. They also have to cope with drug addicts. Our doctors didn't have that problem. It's hard work; they must be overworked. They have too many patients."

Joe:

It's the pace of life, today. It's speeded up. Everybody rushing around after something all the time. There's so many things to do, things to get. We didn't have all that years ago."

Florrie:

"I have been waiting several months now to go into hospital for my diabetes. The doctors say they are behind on their waiting list because of the move to the new (Homerton) Hospital, and then there was this bug that kept things up for a long time. They cannot say when I will go in, so I just have to be prepared to go in on a moment's notice. I want to go away to my son for a holiday, but I have not been able to go in case a letter will come for me to go in."

BEING OLD IN THE 1990s

Whole Group:

Years ago, you looked old even if you weren't. You mum, Joe, was only thirty six, and you thought that was old. Yes, we last longer, now. We've certainly improved; we're older before we let ourselves go. People keep themselves cleaner, now. All this fancy stuff we've got now; push a button showers.

There's no comparison in today's living and years ago, oh no. We was deprived of a lot of things. At least we've got it now we're older.

Before, when people grew old, they were dependent on their families to keep them. If they did not have anybody to look after them, they ended up in the Workhouse. We are independent. We have our own lives, our own interests. It is not much we are getting, but we can look after ourselves."